

Remedies for the Weary Leader

Leadership Class

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Well, I'm greatly privileged to be able to speak on the topic to the people that the Lord's given to us here today. The title, the theme for this morning, is "Remedies for the Weary Leader." Broadly speaking, it's part of the leadership development track that we do on a monthly basis here at Truth Community Church. We bring men and women all so that there can be a common understanding of our leadership philosophy, and so we've been doing that for quite a while now as our different elders teach on different themes. I want to begin this morning by saying just a word to the dear people in the auditorium today. It's the nature of our ministry, I mentioned this on Sunday, I believe, that often we have two to three times as many people watching on the live stream as are present within our walls and today, what I'm doing is I'm speaking primarily to the people on the live stream, and I invite you to listen in as I do that. It will benefit all of us, but my focus today and my intention today is just a little bit different than a typical church gathering, and it's part of our privilege as a local church to minister to the broader body of Christ in the things that we're going to see today. So it's important for you to have that in mind, but I think, I trust that you'll find it edifying and helpful for yourself as well.

So remedies for the weary leader. This has been on my mind for a very, very long time. For over 30 years, I have had the privilege of interacting with men in ministry, truly all over the country and at times around the world. I've sat with pastors in lonely restaurants and listened to them as they poured out their hearts to me about different challenges that they were facing, and, you know, on the East Coast, in the Midwest, on the West Coast, I've stood not that long ago with a pastor and his wife at the gravesite of their son, whom they buried after he died in kind of unexplained circumstances and you look and here's the teenage son that they loved and you feel the weight of that and you talk with them and hear how ministry has gone for them and those kinds of things. And not just pastors, but elders and other church leaders, and I carry those people with me in my heart, you could say. And I am not worthy of the privilege of the relationships that the Lord has given me over those many years. I'm certainly no expert. I don't hold myself out as a Tom Rainer giving advice to churches. It's not my style. It's not what I think is my giftedness. But I think I've had enough collective interaction over the years in a broad cross-section of leadership in different areas to have some kind of, some measure of a collective sense. I have a collective sense of their hearts and what I want to do today is this, I am a voice for those men and I am a voice to those men. And I'm going to start by reading a letter and there are a few things that I want you to know in advance about the letter.

I wrote this letter years ago, okay? I wrote this years ago, not in conjunction with this particular message. It's a lengthy letter, but it frames today's discussion in what I trust will be a helpful and informative way. It is satire, beloved. It is satire that is informed by 30 years of conversations over across many, many relationships, and it's satire used as a teaching tool to introduce and frame the necessity of the discussion that we are having today. This is satire that reflects what men in ministry see on a frequent basis and don't always have the opportunity to give public voice to these things. And so with that in mind that this is satire, when satire is certainly not my genre of choice or expertise, but I just wanted you to have the sense for what is to follow with that little bit of introduction. And so for those of you joining us over the live stream, those of you that are elders or pastors, I'm pretty confident that you'll find a point or two or three or four in this letter that you will really identify with.

So let me read it.

"Dear Pastor Forbes,

I'm writing to tell you that after much prayer, my family is leaving the church effective immediately. Our needs are not being met. I realize that I refused to discuss anything with you beforehand so that you could perhaps address our concerns, but we did pray about it, so our decision is clearly what God wants. Pastor, I would have preferred to tell you these things in person rather than notify you via email, but it's easier for me this way, and that's what I need right now. The Lord wouldn't want me to face any uncomfortable questions about what I'm doing, as shown by the fact that I prayed about it. Now, my decision does violate the membership commitment that I publicly made before God, the elders, and the rest of the church, but that did not cause me any hesitation. Why would it? I prayed about it. Please just explain my departure in a way that protects my reputation to those that I leave behind.

Now Pastor, I realize that the last time we spoke a few days ago, you expressed sincere love for me and my family. You did not suspect my hypocrisy when I returned the same words to you. You really should get with the times. Yes, I suppose that your preaching was motivated by a desire to see Christ glorified for the well-being of my eternal soul, however, that is secondary to my immediate felt needs. It's certainly no reason to stay. Pastor, I know that you never asked for my money, you even graciously overlooked the way that I did not serve in the church. Apparently, you realize that we are an active family with better things to do and as the Bible says, it's better to be served than to serve, so it's all good. There's certainly no need for us to dwell on the way the church came alongside our family with prayers, meals, flowers, and financial help during our time of hardship. I am sorry we did not even send you a thank

you card to acknowledge it, but it was such a busy time as you know. Whatever. The past is past and our family has different needs now.

I expect a gracious response to this email, Pastor. Healthy closure is so important. You should lament our departure, wish us well, and pray for God's blessing on us, however, I won't acknowledge your reply. I'll just be glad to be done with it. It's easier for me this way, especially now that I've prayed about it. I'm being reasonably polite now, Pastor, but please know that in the future my attitude will change. I will increasingly criticize you and the church in private conversations and on social media. Most people that I talk to will automatically believe me because they have never read Proverbs 18:17. or 1 Timothy 5:19. They should believe the worst about abusive Christians like you, even if I just make things up to get sympathy. It is my point, not the facts, that matter. Their subsequent support for me will be a safe place for my soul after the harm you have done to me. Their affirmation will further justify my decision, increase my overbearing self-righteousness, and discourage others from coming under the ministry of the word. We will all be better as a result.

In the future, when I no longer hear from you, your silence will prove that you never cared for me in the first place. It will not occur to me that your withdrawal is a natural consequence of my voluntary departure from your pastoral care. Surely you understand all this, Pastor, and will only think well of me as I leave. My feelings are settled, and yours don't really matter, since you're the one in ministry. It is, after all, the church's fault and not mine. What other conclusion could there be? After all, I prayed about it.

Love in Christ,
A departing member."

Well, my friends, as they say in the movies, and I quote, any resemblance to actual persons living or dead or actual events is purely coincidental. Men in ministry, we cannot stop people from claiming the name of God while they act like and speak like the devil, but we can find sufficient grace in the word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit to stand firm and to be encouraged as we serve Christ in the opportunities and the life and the ministry that he's given to us. I speak today to help weary leaders who know the reality of difficulty and opposition in ministry and everything else and everyone else is secondary to me today.

And so with that in mind, I want to kind of walk through five different sections of remedies, you might say, five different aspects of what I think helps men of God, what helps leaders, perhaps men that are on the very brink of resignation, men who have had enough, whose hearts cannot bear anything more, so it seems. I want to help and postpone that decision of yours just a little bit longer with these five things to say. This is what I would say to you if we were sitting in one of those quiet restaurants in a small

town in Indiana, let's say, and as we talked through sympathetically and with mutual support, the realities of the challenges of ministry. And so I can't do that with everyone that's sitting in or watching in here today but this is the mindset with which I speak. We're at a table. We're across from one another. No one else can hear what we're saying and we're just talking honestly with mutual trust about the things that weigh on our hearts as we minister and as you minister for Christ to the people of God, at least the outwardly confessing people of God.

Let's, first of all, talk about the reality, the reality of opposition, the reality of suffering in ministry, and for that I want to invite you to turn to the book of 2 Timothy. The book of 2 Timothy, this is Paul's last letter. He is on the brink of death. He says, "The time of my departure has come," and he knows that he's writing his final words in ministry. He's passing the spiritual baton to Timothy, a man who, for all of his good qualities was a man that perhaps was wavering, that felt the weight of things, that was timid and perhaps withdrawing and was contemplating his own resignation letter, you might say. And Paul writes to Timothy to help him and in large part in every single chapter that you read, Paul addresses to Timothy the matter of suffering in leadership and he does this in a way that's important for us to remember, that while Paul in the moment was writing to Timothy, he was also writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of God was using the pen of Paul in order to lay down that which is essential for the church for all time until Christ returns, to lay down that which would strengthen the hand of men in ministry for all time. And it's just so important for us to realize that while the outward trappings of life, of culture, with the outward trappings of churches, large and small, change and rise and fall, come and go like the waves of the ocean on the sand, the underlying reality is the same, really. People are the same across time. The issues in ministry are the same across time. That's why I can write a satirical letter with confidence that it resonates with men in many places. Paul's letter to Timothy speaks about the reality of suffering in leadership and I believe that as men in leadership, we have to step back and recognize that reality. We have to stand back and accept that reality and when we do, we will find that it strengthens us for the task at hand. It's easy for us to say, "I didn't sign up for this. I didn't sign up for this kind of ongoing shrapnel in my heart on an ongoing basis," but that's really not the point at all. The point is that Christ called us, placed us into ministry, and we followed, we accepted, we submitted to that call, and the reality is that we chose to follow Christ, not to choose a particular set of circumstances, pleasant or unpleasant, in the reality of it, we simply follow Christ and we let him determine the terms and the realities and the engagement of our service. And so we have to remember that and embrace the reality and reject perhaps some of the self-pity that is easy to come to men in ministry.

So let me just read some of these passages in 2 Timothy chapter 1, 2, 3, and 4, and I just do this so that you see the theme of suffering in leadership, and for the weary leader, seeing that there is an expectation, you could almost say a promise of suffering in ministry from the word of God, then that gives us a different sense and a different response to it. So in 2 Timothy chapter 1, verse 8, actually, let's start in verse 6, Paul says,

6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, 7 for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, 9 who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, 10 and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, 11 for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, 12 which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.

Over in chapter 2, In verse 3, we read this. Actually, I'm reading more than I had planned, and that's great. Chapter 2 verse 1,

1 You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, 2 and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. 3 Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.

Christ says, "You're a soldier in my army, I enlisted you. So as we go into battle, as you go into battle, you prepare and you accept that suffering as part of the condition of the service so that you can please me," in the name of Christ. And so the suffering comes with the territory, it's part of it.

In verse 8, Paul says,

8 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, 9 for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! 10 Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

It's really wonderful, enriching, humbling to see the perspective of Paul as he's literally in chains for the gospel. His vertical focus, "Remember Jesus Christ," and then the horizontal focus that says, "I am enduring this, I am doing this for the sake of the elect." There's love in his heart vertically for Christ, there's love in his heart for the elect, and so the suffering and the reality of suffering is something secondary to him, to the Commander who called him to battle and to the fellow soldiers for whom he is suffering and whom he is serving.

2 Timothy chapter 3, beginning in verse 1. Paul says,

1 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

Paul says difficulties and sufferings and the reality that ministry sometimes intersects with people like what Paul describes. We can only expect that there's going to be a reality of suffering in response to that as we'll see later, you know, we walk in the footsteps of a crucified Master. We battle in the aftermath of our Commanding General who went before us to the cross of Calvary. Can we really think that there won't be rejection and suffering that come as we follow one who was rejected and suffered on our behalf? That's the reality of things. It's a noble call, it's difficult at times for sure, but one of the ways that we address the weariness in our souls is that we remember this reality, we remember who called us to it, and we carry on, we soldier on, we're renewed in spirit by the nobility of the one who called us, even if at times the difficulty seems almost insurmountable.

Look over at 2 Timothy 4, verse 3, where Paul, after having exhorted Timothy to preach the word in the midst of his suffering, he says in verse 3,

3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 5 As for you, always be sober-minded, [here it is yet again, beloved,] endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Paul says, and it's just very poignant to realize that he's saying these things, he's pleading with Timothy to embrace what he says and Paul says, "You know, my time's over. I'm coming out of the game. I'm being called out of the game, and I've got to leave you on the court to carry on and to lead this team to victory." Paul says in verse 6,

6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

And it's evident that Paul is saying, "Timothy, this can be true of you as well. You can end strong. You can say that I've fought the fight, I've finished the race, I've kept the faith. You can have this crown of righteousness. Just embrace the model," Paul says to Timothy, "that I have given to you and you will finish in this same way with the same result, the same outcome, the same crown given to you by the Lord who called you into ministry."

And so, Paul, look, back up for a moment here, realize with these words that we read, understand, beloved, that we read these words 2,000 years later with, you know, a cup of hot coffee at our desk and, you know, maybe you've got a donut or a bagel over here and it's very comfortable and with the air conditioning and all of that, and from an abstract distance, we look and say, "Man, that's wonderful. That's really great." And what a great person Paul was. But our circumstances as we read that are so different than Paul. Paul did not go out in earthly glory. Paul went out in prison and in chains and church history tells us was beheaded at the end of his ministry, and so we just have to, we have to enter into the spirit of what's said. Paul's heart – listen to me, beloved, listen to me – Paul's heart was obviously filled with the reality of suffering as he wrote this, because it was so much the theme of what he was saying as he concluded. And so he wasn't going out to earthly applause. He was anticipating stepping out in death, as it were, and then entering into heaven to the heavenly applause that would be given to him for his faithful ministry, and he calls each one of us to have a like mind and to follow like that.

And so he didn't go out in earthly glory. At the risk of repeating myself for the sake of the lovely friends that are here in the room with me today, I've spoken to so many men in leadership for so many years, and the pain and the discouragement that they express is profound. There have been so many times where I've said, what do I even say in this circumstance to try to help when there's nothing about these circumstances that are going to change? The pain and discouragement is real and it is profound. You know, it's almost like there is suffering in ministry. And I would never dismiss it. I would never diminish it. I've had a taste or two of it myself over 30 years. That's the reality. And the truth of the matter is, men, is, you know, you join in here or maybe watch the video later, and at the risk of being a little too transparent in front of my own flock here, I don't like carrying around the moving shrapnel in my heart from the battle. It hurts. But it's kind of why I wanted to say these things. I know what it's like, and I want to be an encouragement if the Lord would just allow that to me. And I say this to you men, I know that by and large you are noble men, no matter what your faults may be, no matter how you may have stumbled from time to time, maybe situations that if you had them back you would handle them differently or you feel the weakness of your pulpit because you're not a gifted man like the men that are on television or radio or whatever, but I start from the premise, and I accept you men, I embrace you in a human sense, not in an ultimate sense compared to Christ, but I embrace you as faithful men, faithful brothers. I presume that, I assume that without thinking anything about your imperfections. I know that you're like me and we stumble in many ways. I get all of that. I simply speak to encourage you in the name of Christ and remind you of the reality of suffering in the midst of the noble call that the Lord Jesus Christ has given to you.

The preparation for this material has been wonderful in this respect, it's brought me back into contact with some things that Charles Spurgeon said about ministry and all of this and I'm going to quote Spurgeon a few times here this morning. If you can't say anything original from your own thoughts, you know, go to Spurgeon and you'll sound better than you are. Charles Spurgeon said this in response to the constant criticism that he endured particularly toward the end of his ministry. Charles Spurgeon criticized. This is Spurgeon

and I can't emphasize that enough. Today, we look back at Spurgeon and say, what a hero. What a great man of faith. How great that we're still reading his sermons profitably 150 years after the fact. You read about the early success of Spurgeon and you think it was always like that until you get a little deeper into his life. The truth is that Spurgeon was rejected by his contemporaries at the end. The Downgrade Controversy that he went through brought an early end to his life because of the stress that it put on him. He died at the age of 57. You know, I've already lived five years longer than Spurgeon. The church of Christ, in my judgment, would have been far better if the Lord had flipped those demographics, but whatever. Spurgeon said this in response about the reality of constant criticism in ministry. He said, "We are now in fine fighting condition, for we are hardened by former blows. A great boxer at Rome was so battered, his nose, eyes, and face were so disfigured that he was always ready to fight. He said, 'I cannot look worse than I do.' Personally," now this is Spurgeon still speaking and understanding that Spurgeon's using a metaphor about the boxer, "Personally," this is Spurgeon speaking, "I am in much the same plight. Men cannot say anything worse of me than they have already said. I have been distorted from head to foot and misrepresented to the last degree. My good looks are gone and none can damage me much now." Spurgeon knew the reality of distorting criticism in ministry to the point that, you know, as I understand what he's saying, he's saying, "You know, my reputation's already been shot here by all of the things that people have said. I don't have anything to lose by way of reputation, so I'm just going to soldier on, acknowledge the suffering, and move on and trust the Lord for the outcome of that." That's the reality of ministry, and to see it affirmed by a giant like Spurgeon, to see it affirmed by an apostle like Paul, men, gives us a sense that maybe there's a noble strand to what we engage and what we see in ministry that we can't quite understand from our present perspective. That's the reality of suffering in ministry.

Let's move on to the second point. We're still sitting at this restaurant. The Lord's given me an opportunity to speak to you, "Could you hand me the salt there, please? I need a little more on my tenderloin here." Let's talk about the record of suffering. The record of suffering. This is a gross oversimplification, but for purposes of today's message of this session, I want to say this. I think in my judgment there are three kinds of biblical pastors, and I use that adjective "biblical" strategically and advisedly, three kinds of biblical pastors that are teaching the word and leading the flock and trying to exercise pastoral care and leadership in the name of Christ. There's three kinds of pastors like that. Number one, there are those that have faced opposition in the past. Number two, there are those facing opposition now. And number three, there are those that will face opposition if they haven't faced it yet. And so, take heart, men, sorrow comes with the territory. It really does. And in a sense, I mean, really, not in a sense, in a great, profound way, that's perfectly okay. We can embrace that because we're saved by a Christ, we're called into ministry by a Christ, we're sustained by Christ, we will one day stand before the Christ who in his earthly life was, what? He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He wept at the tomb of Lazarus. He felt the hot breath of opposition from the Pharisees and others in his ministry. He felt the spittle on his face as they were preparing him for crucifixion. His sacred head was now wounded as the crown of thorns was thrust in and a mock crown put upon him. He wept over Jerusalem. He looked on Jerusalem, said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how many times I would have gathered you under my wings with

my pastoral heart and shown you love and protection, but you would not have it." And it wounded and grieved Christ in his loving, divine heart to see the rejection of his ministry. He did not want it that way and it was not a matter of casual indifference to him that he just rode above the waves in his nature of deity and the nature of his humanity. He felt the weight of that and it grieved him deeply. It grieved him to tears and he wept over it and this is the man, this is the Lord that we are identified with.

So I come back to the question we think about the record of suffering, do we really expect to be distinct and to go through ministry on behalf of a man like that and not enter into the sufferings that he went through and share in the sufferings that our Lord knew to a far greater degree? Would we even want to? Would we want to be a soldier in an army with a glorified Commander who the Old Testament repeatedly refers to as a warrior, do we want to serve in an army with a glorious Warrior who has conquered in his first coming, who will conquer again in his second coming, and not engage in some battles of our own? Not to feel some wounds of our own of just an inner nature when the flesh of our Lord was torn on our behalf, when his soul was rent asunder by the divine wrath that was outpoured upon him on the cross, would we really want to do ministry and not taste of that at least? A quick survey of biblical history will show us that it's always been this way for men of God. It's always been this way for men of God. Abel in Genesis had his Cain, his brother Cain. Joseph had his 11 jealous brothers. Moses had his Pharaoh and had the opposition of the people of Israel and had those in Miriam and Aaron, I believe, you know, and so many things going on in my mind, I'm not remembering everything clearly here, but you know, that directly challenged his leadership. "Who do you think you are that you should be in leadership?" The Lord dealt with that and vindicated his servant. Joshua had the opposition of nations, you know, and dealt with the 10 spies who went out and said, "No, we can't go into that land. We can't do that." And so Joshua dealt with, mark this, Joshua dealt with majority opposition in his ministry, the 10 spies against two that said, "No, let's go in and conquer it." David had his Saul. Elijah had his Jezebel and the 450 prophets of Baal. Nehemiah had his Sanballat. Mordecai had his Haman. Paul had the unconverted Jews. Supremely, Jesus had Satan in the temptations. Jesus had the Pharisees. Jesus had Peter. On and on it goes.

And beloved, it's well known and one of the things that men in ministry really need to do is they need to be reading biographies of the great Christian leaders of the past, reading things like great leaders from the 18th century by J. C. Ryle, reading every biography that Iain Murray has ever written, reading Fullerton on Charles Spurgeon and others. It's well known when you read the biographies that Jonathan Edwards was kicked out of his own church and his life died; he didn't go out in a blaze of glory. He ministered to a small group of Indians after his pastoral ministry was over and then died of a smallpox vaccine that went bad after getting a brief position of leadership at a university. Spurgeon, I mentioned that in the Downgrade Controversy, was almost unanimously rejected by his contemporaries in the Baptist Union. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was contradicted publicly at a major conference by John Stott and his position was misrepresented and he faced the consequences of that. All these men and many, many others. John MacArthur, it's well known early in his ministry, he's spoken about this many times, shortly after he came to Grace Community Church, a majority of the staff resigned on what's either called Black

Monday or Black Tuesday. John has talked often about the fact that he sat down with these men, this is decades and decades ago, sat down with these men and he said, "I am just so glad to have you men as my friends and to have you alongside in my ministry." And as John has told the story over the years, the response to that is, "If you think we're your friends, you've got another thing coming. We're resigning today." And they walked out on him. But think about that, my friends, whatever the contemporaries do, look at what time has vindicated in the reputation of Jonathan Edwards. He's routinely recognized as the greatest theologian ever produced on American soil. Look at Spurgeon. Look at Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Look at John MacArthur and the subsequent 50 years of his ministry after all of those times. In addition to all of the biblical men that I mentioned, here's my perspective on that. I look at men like that with Christ as our Captain, and I say this, if I can just be an equipment manager on that team, I would have the most noble position possible in life. If I can just be on the outskirts. If I could stand outside as the doorkeeper to that locker room, that's where I want to be.

And the point, men, is this: our contemporaries and even our congregations are not safe judges. They are not necessarily reliable judges of the faithfulness of our ministry, the effectiveness of our ministry, or anything of the kind because discipleship to Christ is not designed to make us popular. It's not designed to win the applause of people today and the sooner that we get that out of our minds, the better. And it's really difficult in our day and age where the ministries that are applauded in in any town, applauded generally speaking, are the big ones. Even in Christian conferences, it's predominantly the pastors of big churches that get the speaking slots, and I don't care about that. I don't even, you know, I don't think much about, I don't have a lot of, I question the long-term value of conference ministry, let me put it that way. I think that the best ministry, what the Lord has appointed is ministry in the local church done faithfully over a long period of time that doesn't bring a lot of glory to you, doesn't bring a lot of fees or trinkets or anything like that. My point is that in the mindset in which we live in the world and in the broad church speaking that larger is better and applause is an indication of faithfulness, we just have to realize that the judgment of those broader things is not a reliable indication. If it was reliable, Edwards would be on the dust heap of history. So would Spurgeon. So would Lloyd-Jones. But we see as we walk over that, and so would the Apostle Paul, so would the 12 apostles, excluding Judas, 11 of whom were martyred for their faith, and the other one was exiled to a rocky island to live out his final days, from which we got the book of Revelation. The idea that we can look at how a man is received in the immediate present by those that are around him as if that were a reliable judge of the man himself, a judge of his ministry, it's not true. That is not a reliable indication of anything. Discipleship to Christ is not designed to make us popular. It's not. It's not as shown by the record of suffering.

Mark chapter 8 verse 34 and 38, Jesus called "the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.' The cross being an instrument of execution. "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this

adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." We live today in an adulterous, sinful generation. How could it possibly be that an adulterous, sinful generation would be a reliable evaluator of a biblical ministry? Charles Spurgeon again, said this and I quote, "This leads me to say that apart from afflictions, temptations and persecutions, the preaching of the gospel is, in itself, a means of dividing the true followers of Christ from those who are only his disciples in name and, wherever there is a faithful, Christ-like ministry, you will find many going away from it for the very same reasons that those nominal disciples went away from Christ."

That's the record of suffering in ministry and because of that, my friends, "Could you hand me the pepper there for my potatoes?" We're at the restaurant, remember? Popularity is not the goal on an individual or a corporate level. Popularity and even acceptance is not the measure by which we can be judged. The only ambition that matters is loyalty to Christ, fidelity to his word, enduring suffering for the sake of the gospel. Look, we saw that so much in 2 Timothy. Suffering is painful and ministry involves suffering and therefore involves pain, and when you're weary, you can come back and drink from this fountain and find some refreshments and say, "Ah, this actually, what I'm going through in ministry actually fits the pattern of the great men that went before me." And men, I often, I've said from the pulpit here, I care a lot more about my forefathers in the faith that have gone on to glory, I care more about the coming generations that are yet to be born, yet to be believed, to have something to pass on to them, I care much, much more about that than any passing rejection or criticism that comes to my ministry from the people around me. There's a much bigger context to what we do. It's a transcendent context and if we have the privilege of putting our toes in the water where the great men have swum, then that's a privilege. And it frees us. My point of all of that is that it frees us from a necessary preoccupation with what's happening in the moment with a sense of the greater context in which we minister.

So we've seen, number one, we've seen the reality of suffering. Number two, we've seen the record of suffering. Let's consider number three briefly here, the reason for the suffering. The reason for the suffering, and I said singular, we could actually make it plural, the reasons for suffering, and I think there are two aspects of this that I want to bring out. Number one is that Christ himself told us to expect hatred and rejection as we follow him. He told us to expect that and turn in your Bibles to John chapter 15. John chapter 15 in verses 18 through 21. And this is a familiar text. I'm not going to spend any extended time on it. But just to remind you of the reason for the difficulties, the sufferings that we face.

18 If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.
19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. 21

But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

Christ says, and we've already talked about this this morning, "You're following me. They hated me, they rejected me, they killed me," you know, looking at it you know, somewhat prophetically in what was just about to take place in his life, "and if you're following me, then it's going to be the same for you." And the thought, you know, I think, you know, as you talk to young men and try to get a sense of their aspirations as they're talking about ministry and, you know, they want to help people or, you know, that maybe they're attracted to, you know, a prominent preacher and they kind of like the, you know, they see only the public aspect of it and they're attracted to the, you know, the attention that that brings, you know, with mixed motives or whatever and, you know, that's not the full long-term reality. And I said this when I first announced this session, I said, you know, I don't remember seminary preparing me for these kinds of issues. I don't remember my pastoral ministry classes really going into this and I went back and looked at my notes and there was like, you know, there was a short section that was probably covered in 10 minutes in, you know, in a class lecture with other things and so I vindicate my esteemed professors from 30 years ago on this. But I came out of seminary, I came out of seminary having a much better idea how to distinguish the subjective genitive from the objective genitive in the Greek language but I was not very well prepared to deal with the relational aspects of things that would come in ministry. And that's why I want to say these things, that's why I wanted to have this session is that, you know, this, you know, and the reality is, if you fronted seminary recruitment with these kinds of things, if you were recruiting and being direct and candid on these things, enrollment would go down. Number one, retention would be difficult going on. You know, there's just this underside, there's the shadows of things that aren't as freely discussed and I don't accept that. I don't embrace the fact that these things should be kept in the shadows and men like you should suffer in silence wondering what's wrong with you. There's nothing wrong with you. There's nothing wrong with you. You're suffering for the sake of Christ, and that's a glorious position for you to be in. And we get the overflow of what the world poured out on Christ. They poured it out, they dumped it out on him, and it splashes over on us. That's all right. That's okay. It comes with the ground we occupy.

But men, let's have the humility to acknowledge something else in this regard and I invite you to turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 12 with me. 2 Corinthians chapter 12. The truth is, is that you and I, we need this. It's necessary for us and you and I need to have the humility that God uses the pain and suffering of ministry in our lives and it has a very vital and crucial role in the work of God in his ministers, and we would be fools to ignore this and to not balance out our perspective with these things in mind. 2 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 7, Paul writing to a church that had rejected him and he was trying to call them back, a church that had caused so much pain to his heart. He's defending his apostleship in 2 Corinthians and showing that they should not reject him but follow him for the sake of Christ. And earlier in chapter 12 he'd said, "I've been to the third heaven. I've seen visions that I'm not allowed to speak of." And that sounds really cool. That would attract men to apply for seminary to think that you could go to the third heaven if you just get in

on the action with the Apostle Paul. Well, you have to realize that the action for the Apostle Paul brought other things as well. So he says in verse 7,

7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.

And we'll come to the outcome of that in a moment here later in the message but men, God sent the affliction to Paul, you know, and used Satan somehow to be the delivery mechanism of the pain and the difficulty, so much so that Paul said, "Lord, take this away. Lord, take this away. Lord, I'm asking you a third time, take this away!" And the Lord did not take it away and the reason that he didn't was because it was part of his purpose in the life of Paul. He sent that satanic affliction to Paul in order to keep Paul humble. The spiritual privileges that Paul had, especially if you look back on his life as a Pharisee, he was a very proud man prior to his conversion and so there was something in his disposition that wired him toward self-exaltation, his spiritual privileges would have led him to pride and so the Lord sent him things that kept him humble, that kept him dependent on the Lord in order that he would not compromise his ministry by falling into the sin of spiritual pride, and we learn from that that in the purpose and the plan of God, that the sanctification of the instrument is more important than his comfort. It's more important for the instrument to be sanctified than it is for him to be popular, comfortable, or whatever else, outwardly successful. And brothers, in the midst of your affliction, understand, remember, accept it by faith, even if you don't see the need and reason for it, that somehow God is advancing your sanctification in the midst of your suffering, that you would be a fit instrument for the service that he has given to you. That is the key. We walk and follow Christ as one reason for our suffering. God sends the sufferings to humble us and to keep us dependent upon him and if fellowship with Christ and the fellowship of his sufferings, Philippians 3, is a worthwhile goal, then the means that brings that suffering is something we can embrace. If sanctification is something that we desire and is critical in the purpose of God and suffering is the means that advances sanctification, then there's a reason for it and that is key and we can embrace that.

Now two more points. I'll try to deal with these quickly. Let's talk about the resource in suffering. The resource in suffering, and the resource is the grace and purpose of God in it all. You all know what follows in Paul's testimony. Look at verse 9 there. God came to him and said, "My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness." God says, "There's a limit. I establish parameters to this, and I sustain you in the midst of it, and that's enough. That's all that you need." It reminds me of Peter in John chapter 21, where the Lord had told him that he would suffer one day. Peter says, "Well, what about John here and what's going to happen to John?" And the Lord tells Peter, says, "Don't worry about John. You just follow me." And so the Lord comes to us with the promise of the sufficiency of his grace and says, "Whatever else is happening, you just follow me. You rely on my grace. You accept day by day my mercies, which are new every morning, and rely on that for the sufficiency of what you are to do and what is given to you."

And we remember, you know, at the end of Joseph's life in Genesis 50, verse 20, Joseph said to his brothers, and Joseph being somewhat of a prefiguring of Christ, he said, "You meant evil against me but God meant it for good." We remember Romans 8:28, "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose." And so in the midst of the heartache, in the midst of those days where you put your head on your desk and heave out a heavy sigh and wonder where you're going to get the strength to step into the Wednesday night study or whatever comes next, come back to the resource, the sufficiency of grace, that unseen provision, that intangible provision that enables us day by day to go through it. And we would not look to that grace if we didn't feel the need for it and so the resource is the sufficiency of God's grace and Spurgeon, once again, gives us another perspective on it as I read again this quotation. Spurgeon said, "Not the one who is most praised, but the one who is most censured by the world, is probably the man who has been most faithful to his Master and to the gospel committed to his charge."

And men, wherever you are, if you share anything of like convictions with our church, I believe the best about you and if you're suffering for the sake of trying to minister the word of God in those kinds of shared convictions, take heart that the grace of God is sustaining you and providing for you and ordering your steps, and if the Lord has sent affliction, it's because it's wise, it's good, it's loving, it's what's necessary for the time, and that will bring us to our fifth point to really solidify and seal the motivation to continue on and to persevere and that is the reward. The reward, point number five, the reward for suffering. We can persevere, men, we actually can. We can actually persevere in these things if we keep the eternal perspective in mind about these things and for that I invite you to turn again to a familiar passage, Matthew chapter 5. Matthew chapter 5 at the end of the Beatitudes, the Beatitudes which are an expression of the character that marks those who alone will enter into the kingdom of God, and one of the essential true aspects of discipleship, of the fruit of true repentance, is the nature of this kind of suffering that we've been talking about here this morning.

These are the words of our Lord himself. We are entitled in our suffering and the rejection that comes with ministry to look at these words and appropriate them for ourselves. It's why the Lord said these things, is to help us and he says in Matthew chapter 5 verse 10, he says, "Blessed." Blessed. The word has the idea that he's describing a person who is the privileged recipient of divine favor, that as Jesus describes the man, the woman in the Beatitudes that is mourning over sin and repenting and hungering and thirsting after righteousness, he says this is a person that has been on the receiving end of divine favor and divine favor of a lasting nature that culminates in the kingdom of God to come. Jesus says, verse 10,

10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Now, I don't want to commend my own message here, although I guess I'm going to do it in a backhanded way, notice that Jesus appealed to the record of suffering like I did when he said, "The prophets that went before you, those acknowledged men of God, they were persecuted by their contemporaries. They were isolated. They were cast out." Jeremiah had no outward fruit to his ministry over the course of 50 years and Jeremiah, like Christ, was a man of tears, a man of sorrows. And so Christ, knowing and just quickly bringing in the whole prior 1,500 years of prophetic ministry to bear on the statement, says, "You who suffer like this, rejoice and be glad. Take hope, take courage, be strong, be courageous in the midst of it all not because of any promise of present change, but because the promise of future reward." Your reward is going to be great one day, men, and in reverse proportion to the isolation and the loneliness and the difficulty and the tears and the heavy sighs that you've experienced in ministry, your reward in heaven is going to be out of all proportion reversed compared to what it seems like now. And that's not me giving some kind of false motivational comment. This is the promise of Christ that can never fail.

And it's true, speaking now within the room, it's true for every true Christian, every true disciple that knows the rejection at the hands of family, that knows the rejection or the loss of employment, or suffers in different ways, and you endure the whisper campaigns of those that try to undermine you in your circle of friends. Christ says you're on the receiving end of blessing. That will not be lost. The psalm says that God keeps our tears in a bottle, meaning that he remembers them all and nothing of the suffering will ever be lost in his sight, and in due time, in God's time, in eternity, there will be a reward out of all proportion for every tear, every sigh of your heart that you've ever shed in ministry. It's a great encouragement. It's a great hope that we believe now, we take possession of it now by faith while awaiting for the consummation where it is given to us in reality visibly and out of all proportion to what we deserve. That's grace.

Let me just read a couple of other passages as we soon close here. Romans chapter 8 verse 18 says this, and actually let's go back to verse 16. Paul, talking to believers, says,

16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

And in verse 18 Paul says,

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

You know, when my mind enters this realm of thought, this realm of biblical teaching, I don't want to leave it. I want to go into this realm and I want to stay there. I want someone to pour concrete around my feet in this realm of thought so that I can never leave the promise of the glory that is to be revealed to us that utterly dwarfs any

sufferings that we may go through in the present time. They're suffering, but look to the reward.

And then, finally, in 2 Corinthians, chapter 4, a text that I have often tried to direct people's attentions to, need to be more diligent about coming back to it in my own thoughts for my own self. 2 Corinthians chapter 4, I want to start in verse 7. Paul says,

7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you. 13 Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, 14 knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

The promise of a resurrection, resurrected out of literal physical death, resurrected out of the dying process that is sanctification and often life in ministry, resurrected out of all of that, delivered out of all of that realm that belongs only to earth, and delivered into the realm of the glory of God guaranteed to us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ with whom we are in perfect union so that his death and his resurrection are ours. And it could be no other outcome but a resurrection in glory because we died with Christ, we are raised with Christ, and one day we will enter into the fullness of that resurrection. And that is our hope, that is our reward.

And so, verse 16, Paul says so in light of that, in light of coming glory,

16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

And look at what he says here,

17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Let me quote Spurgeon one final time, and I say this for the benefit of those men in leadership, especially watching in, viewing the video later. Spurgeon said, "the preacher may not get credit for his work in the statistics that reckon scores and hundreds, but in that other book, which no secretary could keep, where things are weighed rather than numbered, the worker's register will greatly honor his Master."

And so, my brothers in ministry, my dear flock at Truth Community, feeling the weight of your own afflictions, perhaps in a slightly different realm, take heart. Take heart, those of you especially that are weary in leadership. Trust the Lord as he works all things to his glory. Let me say by way of gentle encouragement and direction even, to humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, knowing that he will exalt you at the proper time. Accept it in his sight. Accept it as coming from him. Accept it in light of the reward, the future reward, even as a gift from him that will redound in geometrically, exponentially greater ways throughout all of eternity than anything that we go through here on earth. If we had, my brothers, I know for certain, if we had a single glimpse of just a moment where we could glimpse into eternity and see the reward poured out upon those who suffer in the midst of faithful ministry, we would gladly embrace it all and ask for more. But that's not given to us because the Lord would have us embrace it by faith, embrace it based on his promise, be satisfied with the promise of the word without seeing anything of the outcome. And that's our opportunity and so we humble ourselves under the midst of it, in the midst of it, knowing by faith, knowing with certain confidence of hope that he will exalt you at the proper time. And men, I just want to say to you that as you do that, as you walk through things like that, I just want you to know that you have friends here at Truth Community Church who believe in you, who support you, who want to be alongside you, who look forward to that great day of rejoicing and seeing you honored and enjoying the reward in heaven from your labors here on earth. We look forward to that and are confident of the Lord's purpose in your life to that end.

Let's pray together.

Gracious Lord, we thank you for your promise We thank you for the privilege of being Christians, the privilege of whatever service you give to us in the body of Christ. We thank you by faith and embrace sometimes the weary nature of the difficulties that come with that knowing that you are working it all together for good, that you work all things after the counsel of your will. If you chose us and redeemed us at the cross and regenerated us by the Spirit in our conversion and who sustained us to this day, there can be no possible outcome but glory, but a complete vindication of your faithfulness to us, a complete vindication of your protection of us, a complete vindication of your help for us. And so we thank you now by faith for that final reality and we pray for these dear friends and brothers in ministry, that you would bless them greatly and encourage and help them, and if you would see fit to grant them a sight of a greater measure of earthly fruit to encourage them while they wait, Father, we would ask for that, but if you withhold that for the sake of a greater reward in heaven, we rejoice in that as well. Thank you for your word. Thank you for Jesus Christ who loved us and gave himself up for us. Thank you for the Spirit who renews us and keeps us. Thank you for your mercies which are new every morning. Help us to walk faithfully with thee until you call us home to heaven. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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